

MATT HAMMITT: INTO THE HEART AND MIND OF

# SANCTUS REAL

INTERVIEW BY KIRK NOONAN

It's a late Friday afternoon when Rhett, my 7-year-old son, and I meet Matt Hammitt, 26, lead singer for Sanctus Real, in the belly of the Shrine Mosque Auditorium in downtown Springfield, Mo. Only a couple of hours from taking the stage, Hammitt settles into a metal folding chair in a long banquet hall. He tells us the band's new album, *The Face of Love*, is coming out this month. But as we get beyond the preliminary questions, Hammitt becomes transparently honest as he talks about the band, his faith, marriage and sex. As he does, I can't help but think that I am on a guided tour of his soul and mind.

**KIRK NOONAN:** You've said accountability and prayer have carried this band. How so?

**MATT HAMMITT:** For our first few years we had an accountability pastor we met with every two or three weeks. We'd talk candidly about our struggles, being in a band and trying to stay pure. As guys who wanted to glorify God and who were singing Christian lyrics, we knew we had to live above reproach. It wasn't that anything crazy was going on. We just knew we had to be open and communicate. That foundation of accountability is one of the most valuable things we've ever done.

**KN:** How old were you when the band started?

**MH:** Sixteen.

**KN:** Having an accountability pastor seems like a wise thing to do. Where'd such wisdom come from?

**MH:** It was one of those things we knew to do and we had a friend who managed us at the time who told us there was value in it.

**KN:** Besides being open about your temptations, what else did accountability do for you?

**MH:** We've had a couple different members in the band besides Chris, Mark and me. Because of it we've

had to confront some issues that required wisdom beyond us. To have a pastor there to help us through that and encourage us to keep doing the right thing was huge.

**KN:** You've said Sanctus Real is your ministry. How important has prayer been to the band?

**MH:** There have been great times where we've all been in the same heart and mind as Christ encourages in Scripture. And there have been times when we have been terrible about praying together as a group.

But God is faithful. When we have grateful hearts and get together and trust God to do something

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awesome through our lives and the band, He does.

It's amazing after we've prayed specifically and had a desire in our hearts to reach students at a particular concert through our songs. They come up to us and say, "You or your song really touched my life." To us, that's invaluable and an answer to prayer.



Matt and Sarah Hammitt start a new journey with Emmerson Mae.

**KN:** How long have you been married?

**MH:** Four and a half years.

**KN:** Any kids?

**MH:** One on the way. A little baby girl who will be named Emmerson Mae Hammitt. [A blonde haired woman walks up and pulls a chair close to Matt. He looks at her proudly].

**MH:** This is my wife, Sarah.

**KN:** Good to meet you. I didn't know you were going to be here, but since you are, can we talk about marriage for a few minutes?

**MH:** That'd be awesome.

**SARAH HAMMITT:** Sure.

**KN:** How did you two meet?

**SH:** I saw him during my freshman year in college when he was performing at a missions convention. I was

kind of rowdy in college and was like, 'He'd be perfect and could help turn me around.' But there were a thousand people there so I prayed for him every day for one week because I thought, 'I'm going to marry that guy someday.'

That summer I did a missions trip for three months and the Lord told me to get my life together. So I rededicated my life to Him. I came back home and six months had passed since I had last seen Matt. I'd forgotten about him and my prayers to marry him, but that week I went to a concert two hours from my home and there he was.

**MH:** I was performing at this event in Columbus, Ohio, and —

**SH:** [Interrupting] This is six years ago.

**MH:** Yeah, six years ago. I saw her and she was laughing and I liked her smile. Intrigued, I wanted to talk to her so bad, but I was like, *We're in Columbus and she probably has a boyfriend.* So I wasn't ready to take a risk.

The next day we were playing at a church fair. On stage I look out and see her in the audience again and I just flipped out.

**SH:** I didn't know he was going to be there.

**MH:** As soon as I finished playing I walked over to her and introduced myself.

**KN:** How do you think kids are going to change your life?

**MH:** Pretty drastically, but we're so excited about it.

**SH:** I thought life would change a lot more than it has, but now that we're used to the idea of having a baby it's no big deal. She'll be our little friend and she'll adapt to our lifestyle [laughing].

**KN:** From experience I can tell you one kid doesn't change what you do too much, but the second and third will.

**SH:** She'll be an only child for a while.

**MH:** One thing in the band we've always guarded is our family policy. God and family always come first.

Whenever our wives and kids want to come on tour, they're welcome. Our wives allow us to do what we do, so anything we can do to make

their lives easier we'll do.

**KN:** Sanctus Real has had a measure of success — how do you deal with it?

**MH:** No matter how much musical success we have it never settles with us — we don't think like that. Our desire is to be real on a day-to-day basis and reach out to people. The musical success is only icing on the cake.

**KN:** What do you say to a teen who has an ambition to do something great for God?

**MH:** Trust God completely. So many people think they have to have a plan, but plans can sometimes be the things we have to let go of. If you have a gut feeling and know it's from God, go for it. Don't think twice.

**KN:** How can teens stay sexually pure?

**MH:** The pressures are so real and there are so many lines to draw. But if students learn to love Jesus and trust Him with all their hearts they'll know in their hearts what is right.

When I was in high school and had temptations I felt sick because the Holy Spirit would say, "Don't you dare do that."

You can harden your heart and go down the path God doesn't want for you. Or you can be sensitive to that calling from the Holy Spirit and say, "I love Christ enough to do the right thing no matter what."

**KN:** What do you say to a teen who has made some mistakes regarding their purity?

**MH:** Some teens who make mistakes in the past feel like since they failed once it doesn't matter now if they do it again. I'd tell them that is so untrue. No matter what you've done, God's grace is much greater.

When you know God loves you in your most disgusting moment and He is ready for you to receive the love and forgiveness He has for you, you can respect yourself. In return you can love other people the way Christ does.

**SH:** I always heard that we're like pieces of tape. When two pieces come together, they are meant to only stick to that other piece of tape. If you pull tape apart again and again, it loses its stickiness. The same is true with intimacy. When you have different

## NO MATTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE, GOD'S GRACE IS MUCH GREATER. MH

sexual partners, it's like your tape loses its stickiness because it sticks then separates over and over again. God designed us to have one partner.

**MH:** Wow, I haven't heard it put like that before, that's really cool.

**KN:** Matt, you grew up in an AG church?

**MH:** I was in the youth leadership of Calvary

Assembly of God in Toledo, Ohio [Pastor Doug Clay].

**KN:** What difference has the Holy Spirit played in your life?

**MH:** Just understanding how pow-

erful the Holy Spirit can be in any given moment in your life is so unreal. Students who are open to the Holy Spirit allow the Holy Spirit to work through them. Growing up in a church that taught me that truth was a huge benefit. Because of it I've learned to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit every day.

**KN:** Why should teens embrace their God-given talents rather than try to acquire talents they don't have?

**MH:** It seems every kid wants to be the lead in the church drama or play the guitar on the worship team. A lot of people want the spotlight, but sometimes students want so badly to have gifts they don't have they don't use the ones they do have. It's important not to be so blinded with what

you want that you neglect what God has truly blessed you with.

**KN:** What do you say to the teen who has found and accepted his or her God-given gifts?

**MH:** Talent comes naturally to a point, but then you have to refine it. I knew when I was 15 years old that I had a gift for songwriting. Over the years, that gift has slowly gotten better not just through practice, but because other people have poured their influence into my life.

Find the gifts God has given you, then refine them and use them for His glory. **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

**I OPENING**

**Nisar:**

- Memorized the Quran by age 13
- Prays five times a day
- Believes Jesus was a mere prophet
- No one has told him otherwise

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